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DEPT FOR WHA/FO--G. SNIDLE, WHA/CEN--S. CRAIG
DEPT ALSO FOR INL/LP--A. MARTIN
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD

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SUBJECT: EMBASSY MANAGUA ASSESSMENT OF CENTRAL AMERICA
SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

REF: SECSTATE 107145

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Due to recent political changes in Nicaragua, it remains to be seen whether the GON will continue to cooperate with the U.S. on broad high-level security policy. Even so, day-to-day operational cooperation remains strong, particularly with the National Police and the military. We believe that expanding our practical and direct engagement with appropriate Nicaraguan government agencies, especially the military and the national police, does present viable opportunities both to improve Nicaraguan security and institutionalize Nicaragua's regional integration. With this backdrop, we present the following ideas on what policy actions and assistance could be effective in Nicaragua as part of a comprehensive regional security strategy.

Success Predicated on Four Basic Assumptions

¶2. (C) We believe strongly that there are four underlying assumptions that should apply across all countries in the region and that should weigh heavily in Washington's decisions about what policy and assistance to provide.

--First, the initial phase of policy support or assistance needs to bring all countries to a common baseline via the provision of common equipment with an emphasis on systems that tie the countries' military, law enforcement, and intelligence institutions together. This approach may mean providing "unequal" support to some countries.

--Second, especially in Nicaragua, funds need to be set aside to carry out public diplomacy to correct misperceptions about and to promote U.S. assistance related to this regional strategy.

--Third, assistance, particularly equipment, should include "sustainability packages" that allow receiving nations to develop native capacity to continue efforts on their own long-term.

--Finally, a "burden-sharing" element should be required of all nations, though realistically this would be non-monetary in nature. As has already been seen with the Millennium Challenge Corporation model, contributions of physical facilities, legislative remedies, and the like can go a long

way to creating a lasting sense of ownership by the host country and increase the chance for success.

Suggestions for Nicaragua

¶3. (C) With respect to Nicaragua, there are six areas where additional assets and policies could bind Nicaragua more closely to its neighbors resulting in better regional cooperation and positive results.

-- Border Control: Nicaragua's police, military and the customs and immigration agencies do not possess adequate resources to exert sovereignty over national territory. One key weakness in Nicaragua's border and immigration control is the lack of airport security, which could be greatly improved by installing a complete and functional video monitoring system and the comprehensive implementation of the PISCES immigration system. Policy consideration should be given to determining how the C-4 Customs Union, of which Nicaragua is a member, might be strengthened to expand its defensive-ring potential. Perhaps integration into the larger CAFTA-DR structure would produce the greatest effect. Despite attendant fuel constraints, providing fixed- and rotary-wing air assets as well as additional water assets would improve activities to combat trafficking of narcotics, humans, as well as of rare and protected species.

-- Military Cooperation: A regional solution to improve security can not be successful without considering military cooperation. Like nearly every other country in the region, Nicaragua desperately needs transportation helicopters and lift capacity. To be useful, however, any new physical assets must be accompanied by, and should not be delivered without, host country agreement for a "sustainability package" that includes spare parts, training and maintenance.

Such a package should be designed to develop national capacity that can be sustained for the long-term. The provision of any physical assets should also include communications systems that are mutually compatible to encourage cooperation between the countries. In addition, systems that are interoperable with U.S. equipment should be considered where possible.

-- Regional Command and Control: We suggest that a regional command and control/coordination center be considered -- as SICA itself has proposed. This center could be housed at JIATF in Florida or possibly in Honduras at Soto Cano. The institution should at least bring together representatives from national counter-drug and financial crimes enforcement, and possibly counter-terrorism, entities from each country. This center would improve regional coordination and information sharing across national lines. If a U.S. location were selected, Washington should consider providing stipends or scholarships to facilitate the presence of foreign LNOs on a rotational basis.

--Police Presence: Nicaragua has a National Police force; however, outside the capital and major cities the NNP has a limited presence with virtually no presence at all in the Atlantic Provinces. Funding to increase the rural and regional police presence, especially in the lawless Atlantic region of the country, would greatly improve the NNP's capacity and provide a significant deterrent against the traffickers of narcotics, arms, persons, and other illicit goods that utilize routes throughout the region. Increased police manpower would also result in enhanced and more frequent military-police cooperation particularly outside the capital.

--Anti-corruption: Corruption in Nicaragua is endemic and corrosive. In particular, the judiciary here presents a particular challenge -- from top-to-bottom Nicaragua's courts have been stacked, politicized and are routinely manipulated.

However, there are some options that we believe may produce improvement. Nicaragua would benefit from assistance to enforce financial disclosure laws already on the books. Nicaragua is also the only nation in the region without a

financial intelligence unit and will almost certainly fall under international financial sanctions beginning January 2008 due to the lack of progress. We would also propose establishing a regional FINCEN, or help create unit within the existing C-4 Customs Union structure.

-- Gangs: A regional anti-gang strategy has already begun to be implemented. Although Nicaragua does suffer from a growing problem with street gangs, especially in Managua, to this point foreign organizations such as the MS-13 have not been able to establish a long-term presence in the country. However, like its neighbors, there are large numbers of at-risk youth, who due to lack of economic opportunity and social mobility, present potentially fertile ground for gang and organized crime elements that seek to expand. Substantial funding for programs targeting at-risk youth would be a good investment.

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